

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Friday, February 12, 2010 - Yesterday, Congressman John W. Olver (D-Ma), wrote to Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman Gregory B. Jaczko, and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson, to urge them to be “proactive and diligent” in identifying the source of a tritium leak at Entergy Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant, located in Vernon, VT.

The text of Congressman Olver’s letters is below:

The Honorable Gregory B. Jaczko
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

Dear Chairman Jaczko:

I am writing to express my deepest concern about the news that tritium is likely leaking into the Connecticut River from underground piping located at the Entergy Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant in Vernon, VT.

Because the Connecticut River flows from northern Vermont and New Hampshire to Long Island Sound, this leak is troublesome not only to Vermont but also to the other three states through which the river flows. Constituents in my District (MA01), which is located directly downstream and across the state border from this facility, have voiced their increasing concerns about the safety of Vermont Yankee to me over the last month.

Therefore I am writing to implore the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to be proactive and diligent in identifying the source of the tritium leak and in doing what it can to ensure that Entergy takes prompt corrective action to prevent leaks of this nature from occurring

in the future. Furthermore, it seems to me that any tests paid for by Entergy should be independently verified.

I would like to know what testing, if any, is being done to determine if tritium is leaking into the Connecticut River and who is responsible for this testing.

I am interested to know if an immediate shutdown of Vermont Yankee would assist or hinder efforts to identify the source of the tritium leak. If shutting the facility down would increase the likelihood of determining and correcting the source of the leak, I believe that this action should be considered immediately.

Given the news that the Vermont Public Service Board was misled by Entergy Vermont Yankee regarding the existence of underground piping, I ask that the NRC thoroughly review Vermont Yankee's application for license renewal to determine whether or not the information that was provided to the State of Vermont was complete and accurate. Furthermore, I would like to know if the NRC is considering additional oversight and/or fines regarding these recent actions.

I am interested to know the results of NRC's review of Vermont Yankee's implementation of the Nuclear Energy Institute Ground Water Protection Initiative on ground water contamination as it is my understanding that the NRC is considering making this voluntary initiative a permanent regulation.

Finally, I understand that the NRC has concluded that Vermont Yankee has met the safety standards required for license renewal but that the Commission must still rule on appeals that have been filed. I have expressed concerns to the NRC about the safety of this plant time and again over the years. I believe that the events of the last month, coupled with safety and operational failures over the years, raise serious questions about the relicensing of this plant.

I respectfully request that you keep my office informed as more information becomes available and I appreciate your timely attention to this matter.

The Honorable Lisa Jackson

Administrator

Environmental Protection Agency
Ariel Rios Building
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Jackson:

I am writing in response to the alarming news that tritium is likely leaking into the Connecticut River from underground piping located at the Entergy Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant in Vernon, VT. My Congressional District is located directly downstream and across the state border from this nuclear power facility.

In January, elevated levels of radioactive tritium were first found in a groundwater monitoring well on the plant site. Evidently, tritium leaks have occurred at a quarter of the country's 104 nuclear reactors. However, the tritium levels at Vermont Yankee are extremely high. While underground piping is purported to be the source of the contamination, this has yet to be confirmed more than a month after the leaks were discovered. Recent news reports indicate that the highest level of tritium found in a well at the site was tested at 2.6 million picocuries per liter. It is my understanding that the Environmental Protection Agency's limit for tritium in drinking water is 20,000 picocuries per liter.

Yesterday's news that Dr. Wendy Davis, Vermont's Department of Health Commissioner, and

Robert Williams, Vermont Yankee's spokesman, believe that it is reasonable to assume that tritium is reaching the Connecticut River is alarming to residents of Massachusetts who live directly downstream. Today's report that hydrogeological studies performed in the 1960s showed that groundwater flowed to the Connecticut River adds to my constituents' concerns.

In the 1960s, the *New York Times* referred to the Connecticut River as "the nation's best landscaped sewer." Enormous financial resources have been invested in infrastructure along the river to correct this problem. While the Connecticut River was designated as an American Heritage River in 1999, there is still much work to be done. To learn that a cancer-causing radioactive isotope like tritium could be contaminating this waterway is devastating.

Because the Connecticut River flows from northern Vermont and New Hampshire to Long Island Sound, this leak is troublesome not only to Vermont but also to the other three states through which the river flows. It is my strong belief that the EPA should be proactive in working with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission to investigate if this leak has contaminated off-site drinking water wells, local ground water and the Connecticut River and do what it can to stop this contamination. I would like to know what testing, if any, is being done to determine if tritium is leaking into the Connecticut River and who is responsible for this testing. Finally, I would like to know what role the EPA can play in protecting this valuable resource and ensuring public health and safety.

Attached please find my letter to Gregory Jaczko, Chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, detailing my concerns. Your prompt response is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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